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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 001135

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [BG](#)  
SUBJECT: KILLING BY RAB SPARKS PROTESTS

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. A May 18 incident in northwestern Bangladesh has attracted unprecedented domestic criticism of the paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). A man was allegedly beaten to death by RAB officers, resulting in a public protest and subsequent clampdown by the government. END SUMMARY.

DEATH IN A LYCHEE ORCHARD  
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¶2. (U) On the evening of May 18, Mohammad Kamrul Islam Majnu, a 26-year old farmer, was killed in his home village of Choto Bangram outside of Rajshahi in northwestern Bangladesh. Witnesses at the scene allege he was kicked and beaten to death by plainclothes officers from the para-military Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) based in Rajshahi.

¶3. (U) According to a report into the death by the respected human rights organization Odhikar, Majnu helped kidnap a man named Bashirul Islam who had been refusing to pay rent at a local hotel where Islam, his brother Zahirul, and their families were staying. Majnu and the other alleged kidnappers were friends of the hotel owner's son. Bashirul was being held at Majnu's lychee field, and Zahirul sought assistance from the RAB in freeing him.

¶3. (U) According to eyewitnesses interviewed by Odhikar, RAB-5 officers confronted Majnu at his lychee orchard at around 2300 hours on May 18. They accused him of participating in the kidnapping. Eyewitnesses say the RAB officers freed Bashirul. They began beating Majnu with bamboo poles, and kicking and stomping on him when he fell down. The RAB officers also struck Majnu's brother and sick mother and threatened them with "crossfire" when they tried to stop the beating. Majnu's dead body was loaded into a RAB vehicle and brought to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital at around 0100 hours on May 19.

DEATH PROMPTS ANTI-RAB DEMONSTRATIONS  
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¶4. (U) Doctors at the hospital told reporters Majnu's body had evidence of severe beating, but they would not conduct an autopsy because police had already released an inquest report saying there were no signs of trauma to the body. Meanwhile, that same day, RAB-5 headquarters issued a report saying Majnu had been beaten to death by kidnappers. After Majnu's body was handed over to his family for burial, hundreds of villagers participated in demonstrations against the RAB and government that continued for two days.

POLICE AND RAB LAUNCH SEPARATE INVESTIGATIONS  
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15. (U) Given the controversy and conflicting stories surrounding Majnu's death, Deputy Police Commissioner Mahbubar Rahman appointed a magistrate to prepare a new inquest report. That evening the local RAB commanding officer, Colonel Shamsuzzaman Khan, announced a separate probe by RAB headquarters into Majnu's death.

"DIRE CONSEQUENCES" IF CASE IS PURSUED

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16. (U) On May 23, the magistrate's inquest announced "the death occurred due to hemorrhage resulting from injuries that are homicidal in nature." Deputy Police Commissioner Rahman told the press that, since the inquest had found the death to be a murder, "our next investigation is to find the killers." The RAB report that came out later claimed that Majnu was beaten to death by "kidnappers."

17. (U) Bashirul (the kidnappee held at the lychee orchard) and Zahirul Islam, along with a friend, were arrested in Majnu's death, but Majnu's brother told the press that when he pressed for RAB officers to be indicted as well, the RAB threatened him with "dire consequences" if he did not back off. A local journalist told us after the announcement of the inquest results, the RAB "cautioned" the media not to publish stories about the incident. There was no press coverage when Odhikar released its report on the case in late June.

COMMENT

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18. (U) While no one has publicly argued Majnu's innocence,

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the fact that the RAB beat him to death in front of numerous eyewitnesses prompted an unprecedented domestic questioning of the RAB's extrajudicial killings. Regardless of whether disciplinary actions are taken against the officers involved, this case seems to have tarnished the RAB's popularity, at least in the Rajshahi region.  
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